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## Notes and Opinions.

**The Historical Study of the Bible.**—One cannot well deny the legitimacy and the necessity of attempting to ascertain the actual facts concerning the events narrated in the Old and New Testaments, and concerning the rise of the literary material which goes to make up these collections of writings. To place the Bible outside the area of historical research is to isolate it from all other human history, a proceeding which seems inconsistent with the Bible's own origin, and destructive of its proper influence. The Bible arose out of a real history, and reacted upon that history; assuredly the study of these facts, with every possible equipment, is right and useful. Such study is called "higher criticism," to distinguish it from the study of the transmission of the text of the Bible, which is called "lower criticism." The name "higher criticism" does not explain itself, and is still misunderstood by many; so that in its indefiniteness, and because it has been erroneously made the synonym of destructiveness, it strikes terror to the hearts of not a few persons still. But the process which the term denotes is employed in the study of the Bible by the most conservative as well as by progressive and radical scholars. Any investigation of the events, writings, and teachings of the Old and New Testaments, to get at their dates, authors, relations, and historicity, is "higher criticism," whether the conclusions reached coincide with or differ from traditional opinion on the points investigated. In other words, "higher criticism" is a *process*, not a set of results. All professional study of the Bible uses this process; but the students differ in their conclusions because of differences in spiritual apprehension, theological tenets, philosophical preconception, mental caliber, capacity and training for historical research. Condemnation is not to be pronounced against "higher criticism;" but the results attained by the several schools of investigators, and by individual scholars, are to be carefully scrutinized. The thing that vitiates the results—whether traditional, progressive, or radical—is such an *a priori* judgment or bias as predetermines what the conclusions will be concerning the historical facts investigated. And self-deception in this matter is by no means easy to avoid. But most of all must one seek to know the prepossessions, spirit, capacity, and limitations

of those scholars whose writings they study, in order to place a just estimate upon their opinions. Nor should a true humility be neglected, either by the scholars who carry on historical investigations, or by the people who read their writings and assume to pass judgment upon the results of their study.

But, with all this modern study of Bible history and literature, one thing must never be lost sight of: The Old and New Testaments were not written primarily to recite facts for their own sake, but for the ethical and religious instruction which inhered in them, or had come to be associated with them. As Professor S. R. Driver, of Oxford, one of England's greatest Old Testament scholars, recently said in an address:<sup>\*</sup> "The primary aim of the Bible is not to anticipate the discoveries of science, or to teach correct ancient history, but to teach moral and spiritual truths, and history only in so far as it is the vehicle or exponent of these." This comprehensive statement concerning the main purpose of the Bible has been made or accepted in one form or another by almost every competent biblical scholar of the present day, regardless of the school of criticism to which he belongs. Consequently there should no longer be doubt in the mind of anyone upon this point. And the chief intent and value of the Bible are preserved if its ethical and religious significance is not lessened. It is the firm belief and the earnest claim of progressive scholars that the glory and usefulness of the Bible are increased rather than diminished by the better historical knowledge of the Old and New Testaments which has been gained. So Professor Driver, on the same occasion, expressed himself: "I do not understand by teaching such as this [he had made a summary statement of conclusions regarding Old Testament history] that the religious value or authority of the Old Testament would be depreciated or impaired. I believe, on the contrary, that its contents would gain very greatly in reality; it would be read with increased interest and appreciation, and the divine element in it would be placed upon a far firmer and securer foundation than is provided for it by the ordinary view." It may be hoped that no one who is interested in this subject will fail to read Professor G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, which is the latest general discussion along this line from the standpoint of progressive scholarship.

<sup>\*</sup> See this address, entitled "The Old Testament in the Light of Today," reproduced in the *Expositor*, January, 1901.